James Doran was born to James and Margaret Gordon Doran of Washington County, Virginia in 1764. As he got older with a raging war knocking on America's doorstep, James followed the footsteps of his father and older brother and joined the War of 1812, where he moved up in rank to Major. After the war, James Doran moved to Boxes Cove in the Northeast Corner of Alabama. He was the first white man to settle in this cove. It is believed that James Doran married the daughter of Captain John Wood, a Revolutionary War Veteran and Cherokee, who owned 640 acres of land in the cove that he obtained either by the Cherokee Treaty or Treaty of Washington. Apparently, an agreement was established between Captain John Wood and James Doran that James could have the property as long as John could have a home and the head seat at the table for the rest of his life. This cove was later renamed Doran's Cove in honor of James Doran.

In the early 1800s, the James Doran and John Wood house was built in the cove. The first part of the house was built out of logs. The addition to the house was built of limestone blocks with walls sixteen inches thick. At the back of the stone portion of the house were small openings in a large X design. According to a curator at the Winchester museum house, "he advises visitors that the openings were made by leaving out bricks in the X pattern in order to allow the smoke to escape from the early smokehouse." This is the oldest house on record in Jackson County, Alabama, and is still occupied today. A small log house was built over a nearby spring for a refrigeration system for food.

Across the road from Russell Cave, James Doran set aside land for a church that became the first church in the vicinity. It also became the area school. For students that came from far away a dormitory was built just back of the church. The land for a cemetery was to the right of the church. This is where James Doran's wife is buried.

In 1830, James Doran began selling parcels of the 640 acres of land. On September 15, 1830, James Doran sold one of these parcels of land to Thomas Russell whose significance will be explained later. Around this time, James Doran married his 2nd wife Linney Russell, stepsister of Thomas Russell.

On October 28, 1840 James Doran died and was buried in the Doran's Cove Cemetery. Linney remarried shortly after his death. She passed away on February 6, 1852 and was buried in Goshen Presbyterian Cemetery between Winchester and Cowan, Tennessee. John Wood also died in 1840 and rumor has it that he is buried in front of the Doran and Wood house. The land James Doran sold to Thomas Russell later becomes known as Russell Cave National Monument.